

8

Intensifying and softening adverbs

Adverbs are often used before adjectives and verbs either to strengthen their meaning (intensifying adverbs) or to weaken it (softening adverbs).

Her comments were **deeply** offensive. (intensifier – very/extremely)

Her comments were **slightly** offensive. (softener – a little bit)

A Intensifying adverbs

Notice how intensifying adverbs are used to mean ‘extremely’ or ‘completely’ in the sentences below. The expressions marked with * are very informal.

Jane really enjoys doing housework. You should see her flat – it’s always **spotlessly** clean.

It was **downright** rude of Antonio to tell Paula that she looked older than her own mother. I hope he feels **thoroughly** ashamed.

It’s **blatantly** obvious that Olga is only interested in Richard because he’s **stinking** rich*.

I wonder what she’ll do when she finds out he’s **wildly** exaggerated how rich he really is!

I don’t know what I was worrying about! The exam turned out to be **dead** easy*!

This celebrity website is good fun but most of the information is **wildly** inaccurate.

B Softening adverbs

Note the softening adverbs used in these sentences from newspapers.

The spokesperson said the new insurance scheme was only **slightly** different from the old one. [weak collocation; *slightly* can be used with a wide range of adjectives]

The Chief Executive said he was **mildly** surprised by the public interest in the firm’s plans. [*mildly* also collocates with *amusingled, irritatingled, offensive*]

Alfredo Scaluzzi’s new film is **loosely** based on a nineteenth century novel. [*loosely* also collocates with *centred, structured, related, connected*]

Ms Giroa said she regarded reports that she was about to seek a divorce as **faintly** ridiculous. [fairly formal; *faintly* also collocates with *amused, surprised, patronising, absurd*]

C Alternatives to very

There are a variety of words that you can use as alternatives to *very* which collocate with most adjectives, for example: *really, extremely, terribly, incredibly* and *awfully*. Other adverbs collocate with certain adjectives and verbs but not with others.

alternatives to very	✓	NOT
highly	unlikely, educated, recommended	appreciate, influence, interesting
strongly	influence	appreciate
greatly	appreciate, influence	
utterly	absurd, ridiculous	sorry, busy, glad, lonely
completely/totally/entirely	different, dependent, separate	
thoroughly	enjoy	



Absolutely only collocates with adjectives which have strong meanings, e.g. **absolutely** (NOT *very*) **delighted**, **very** (NOT *absolutely*) **happy**.

Exercises

8.1 Match a word from each box to form collocations.

blatantly downright spotlessly
stinking thoroughly wildly

ashamed clean inaccurate
obvious rich rude

8.2 Complete each sentence using a collocation from 8.1.

- 1 He's just bought a 200,000 dollar yacht – he must be
- 2 I'm amazed you didn't realise she was lying! It was to me!
- 3 It was of him not to say hello to the secretary.
- 4 I've been Hoovering and dusting all day, so now my flat is
- 5 Most of the facts were wrong in that news report. It was
- 6 You should be of yourself. Your behaviour was appalling!

8.3 Rewrite the underlined part of each sentence using a collocation from the opposite page.

- 1 The American writer Mark Twain is famous for commenting that reports of his death had been over-exaggerated.
- 2 This restaurant is recommended by many different people.
- 3 The exam was extremely easy; everyone got high marks. (make this informal)
- 4 The musical *West Side Story* is kind of based on the plot of Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*. (make this less informal)
- 5 The idea of the boss singing *Happy Birthday* to me struck me as a little bit ridiculous.
- 6 The success of the Wimbledon tennis tournament is 100% dependent on the weather. (give two answers)
- 7 I really enjoyed the days I spent at your lovely house in the country.
- 8 I was just a little surprised by her decision to quit her job so soon.
- 9 I was really delighted when they told me I'd got the job.
- 10 The new model of this camera is a little bit different from the old one.

8.4 Add intensifying adverbs from the opposite page to these sentences to make the words in bold stronger.

- 1 I **appreciate** the fact that you have given me so much of your time.
- 2 Sometimes Tony says **ridiculous** things.
- 3 The crossword in today's newspaper is **difficult**. I can't even start it!
- 4 It's **sweet** of you to offer to help.
- 5 I found his remarks **offensive**; he should apologise.
- 6 She leads a **lonely** life in a tiny house on a remote island.
- 7 We should try to keep the two groups **separate** from each other.
- 8 She is an **educated** person.
- 9 I've been **busy** all week.
- 10 That meal was **expensive**! I'm not eating there again.

8.5 Are the adverb collocations correct or not? If they are incorrect, correct them using collocations from C opposite.

- 1 I thoroughly enjoyed the film.
- 2 Your help would be strongly appreciated.
- 3 The song is highly influenced by Brazilian folk rhythms.
- 4 I find the situation utterly absurd.

TIP

Look out for more collocations with these words as you listen and read, and record them in collocation bubbles indicating what they do, and do not collocate with.